

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"The Open Gate"  
Dr. J. Dent

March 28, 2010  
Palm/Passion Sunday

It's wonderful to have a fenced in yard. You have your own space, you know where it starts and where it stops. You know what is your responsibility and what is not. The fence ideally keeps the bad out and the good in. It is a boundary marker. It is also a parable for clarity in relationships, for what is my responsibility and what is yours. Oh that our relationships would be as clear as the fenced in yards around some of our homes. A healthy relationship knows when to pick up the garbage, when to let the neighbor handle his, when to say "yes" and when to say "no."

A fenced in yard is great if you have a dog. Now I haven't talked about dogs at all since I've arrived here. We had a dog when I was growing up, named Cyrus, presumably my brother named him after the great Persian kings in the sixth and seventh century B.C. He had all the markings of a Doberman pincher, and my brother brought him home in a shoe box. Well, he never grew to more than half a pure bred Doberman's height, and we never clipped his tail or his ears, so they were floppy instead of pointed. But Cyrus had lots and lots of energy and would run around in great circles when he would see you and jump up and want to be with you when you came home. Something my father used to say none of the rest of the family would ever do for him, or at least as consistently as Cyrus.

And it was a good thing that we had a fenced yard, because on that acre lot in Northern California, Cyrus was gone every time someone left the gate open or if it didn't get latched properly and he could nuzzle it open. And we always wondered, or I did at least, if he would ever come back or simply be run over as so many dogs' fate seemed to be. So the fence kept the good in, kept the dog safe, and made it clear to us and to everyone else what property was ours to manage appropriately.

The cat is another story for another day.

Gates and gatekeepers in the Bible are another discussion that flows from the Psalm 118 which we regularly read on Palm Sunday. The gate is the entry point to the fenced in or walled in section of a property. It is the point at which we are granted or denied access. So when the Psalmist says, "Open

for me the gates of the righteous; I will enter and give thanks to the LORD (v. 19), it is about God opening a gate for us that we cannot open for ourselves. Just as when the defence of the city depended on the gatekeeper allow the good in and keeping the enemy out. Such work is supremely done through the Righteous One, the Messiah, Jesus. Only through Him are we deemed righteous. Only through him can we walk through that gate. If we are to prove how good we are on our own, then we cannot enter. But if we accept that God opens the gate through the sacrifice of Jesus, then we can enter in. This is the work that we celebrate this Holy Week, this Passion Sunday, that Jesus gave himself for us to achieve that which we could not achieve for ourselves. All we need do is accept what Jesus has done for us as a gift. Jesus is the gate. "This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter. I will give you thanks, the Psalmist sings, for you answered me; you have become my salvation." God opens gates that we cannot open, and closes gates that we cannot close.

The stone the builders rejected is the Lord Jesus. It is in this Psalm that Hosanna is used, which means: "Lord, save us! Lord, grant us success!" (118: 25). And that success and salvation is the Lord Himself opening the gate to each one of us, to everyone who would receive the good news. In the New Testament in the gospel of John, chapter 10, Jesus speaks of himself as the gate. Using the shepherd's image, he speaks of the fact that the sheep know the Shepherd and hear his voice. The thief, the enemy, only tries to jump the fence or wall and do harm to the sheep. The thief will lie and do all kinds of things to harm the flock. He will try every illicit way of entering as experienced thieves know. The good Shepherd, who is also the gate, is the Way in, the Way, the Truth, the Life. He will enter through the main gate, the front door.

Today with baptism we say to Liam, come on in. And we say to Elaine and Jason, continue to help Liam come into the flock, the congregation, and be at home among us, until he himself decides whether he wants this as his home. We not only say this to Liam and to the Howells, we say this to everyone here Sunday by Sunday. Come through the gate, make yourself at home, be what God wants you to be and work out your part here.

Commitments to God are special occasions. We commit our children to our God at baptism. Our children commit themselves to God at confirmation. Adults commit themselves to God and to us as they choose to become

Members here at St. David's. We commit our dead to the Lord and are challenged ourselves to re-commitment ourselves to the Lord at funerals.

Throughout life we take steps to learn more about what we believe and take in the fact that commitment and re-commitment to God, to Jesus, to the Holy Spirit are a life-long journey of faith. Giving ourselves to God does not happen automatically. We can be a part of all this and yet miss the core of trusting the Lord, and giving ourselves to Him, for the forgiveness and for the newness of life.

All of us need God when life is unmanageable. We need God through our regular routines. We need God. God opens the gate to us as we approach, but it is up to us to approach and up to us to talk to God. I hope in this next week you will be able to take extra time to approach the gatekeeper. The look on his face is the look of the Prodigal's and Elder son's Father, the look of love, the look of acceptance, the look of grace. Come to the gate. Say what you need to say at the gate. Be honest. Hear what God has to say. Respond.

And such begins the Holy Week of conversation between the Lord and us. We need to hear again all that God has done to show the extraordinary lengths God will go to have relationship with us.

Let us pray.